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Message Text

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44
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 3844

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS ASEC VE
SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING

1. SUMMARY: THERE IS VERY LITTLE TO GO ON IN ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY THE KIDNAPPERS OF WILLIAM NIEHOUS. THE VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES HAVE DEVELOPED SEVERAL THEORIES OVER THE COURSE OF THIS AFFAIR: THAT THE KIDNAPPING WAS AN INSIDE JOB SOMEHOW RELATED TO INTERNAL PROBLEMS IN OWENS-ILLINOIS; THAT FOREIGN EXTREMISTS ARE RESPONSIBLE; OR THAT ONE OF THE SMALL VENEZUELAN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS CARRIED OUT THE CRIME. THE MOST PERSUASIVE HYPOTHESIS IS THAT A BREAKAWAY GROUP FROM ONE OR MORE OF THE TERRORIST MOVEMENTS KIDNAPPED NIEHOUS AS A MEANS OF ESTABLISHING A NEW REVOLUTIONARY IDENTITY. CARLOS BETANCOURT OF BANDERA ROJA IS A PARTICULAR SUSPECT IN THAT REGARD. THE COMMUNIQUES ISSUED BY THE KIDNAPPERS ARE LITERATE AND WELL-WRITTEN, BUT GIVE FEW CLUES AS TO THE IDEOLOGY OR UNDERLYING MOTIVATION OF THE KIDNAPPERS. THE HARD FACT IS THAT THE POLICE HAVE ALMOST NO CLUES AT THIS POINT AND VERY SLIM PROSPECTS IN THAT REGARD. END SUMMARY.

2. WE ARE AWARE OF QUESTIONS RAISED IN THE DEPARTMENT ABOUT THE IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND IDEOLOGY OF THE SELF-STYLED GRUPOS DE COMANDOS REVOLUCIONARIOS, OPERACION "ARGIMIRO GABALDON."
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THESE ECHO THE QUESTIONS WE HAVE BEEN ASKING OURSELVES FROM

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THE OUTSET OF THIS MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

3. FIRST, IT SHOULD BE CLEAR THAT THE POLICE AUTHORITIES HERE HAVE SO FAR DRAWN VIRTUALLY A COMPLETE BLANK. DSIP (THE LOCAL VERSION OF THE FBI) HELD TO THE THEORY FOR SOME TIME THAT THE KIDNAPPING WAS AN INSIDE JOB PERPETRATED FOR SOME REASON RELATED TO OWENS-ILLINOIS OPERATIONS IN VENEZUELA. THE UNLIKELY CHOICE OF NIEHOUS AND THE DOCUMENTS ANNEXED TO THE FIRST COMMUNIQUE DO SUGGEST THAT THE KIDNAPPERS WERE AT SOME POINT IN TOUCH WITH AN O-I EMPLOYEE. BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE DEED WAS MOTIVATED BY DISCONTENT, DISPUTE OR AMBITION WITHIN THE COMPANY. KEY EMPLOYEES HAVE NOW BEEN SUBJECTED TO POLYGRAPH TESTS WITH NEGATIVE RESULTS.

4. THE MORE REASONABLE THEORY HAS BEEN THAT NIEHOUS WAS KIDNAPPED BY ONE OF THE VENEZUELAN TERRORIST GROUPS WITH RECORDS OF PAST ACTIONS OF THIS TYPE: BANDERA ROJA (BR), THE ARMED FORCES OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (FALN), THE ORGANIZATION OF REVOLUTIONARIES (OR) OR REMNANTS OF PUNTO CERO (PC). THE PROBLEM HERE IS THAT NEITHER THE DEMANDS OF THE KIDNAPPERS NOR THE LANGUAGE OF THEIR COMMUNIQUES FOLLOW PREVIOUS PATTERNS. AS YET THERE HAS BEEN NO DEMAND FOR MONEY. THE COMMUNIQUES, WHILE REFLECTING MARXIST PHILOSOPHY, ARE CURIOUSLY LOW-KEYED IN THE IDEOLOGICAL SENSE AND GENERALLY FREE OF THE USUAL EXTREMIST JARGON AND FORMULATIONS.

5. THE VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES HAVE ALSO PLAYED WITH THE IDEA THAT THE KIDNAPPING IS THE WORK OF SOME FOREIGN GROUP--OR AT LEAST WAS INSPIRED AND/OR PLANNED BY FOREIGN EXTREMISTS. THE REFERENCE IN THE FIRST COMMUNIQUE TO THE JCR, THE OBVIOUS PROFESSIONALISM OF THE KIDNAPPERS, THEIR APPARENT HIGH DEGREE OF EDUCATION AND SOME OF THE TERMINOLOGY IN THE COMMUNIQUES ENCOURAGED THIS THEORY. THE RESULT HAS BEEN AN EXTENSIVE ROUNDUP OF CHILEAN AND OTHER SUSPECT REFUGEES, BUT SO FAR TO NO AVAIL. THE STATEMENT FROM CHANNEL 2'S CONTACT (CARACAS 3639) REFERRING TO "TUPAMAROS" DOES NOT APPEAR VERY MEANINGFUL, IF IN FACT THE WHOLE AFFAIR WAS NOT SIMPLY A HOAX.

6. MINISTER OF INTERIOR LEPAGE TOLD ME APRIL 1 HE HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE KIDNAPPERS WERE A "NEW GROUP" BENT ON CONFIDENTIAL

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ESTABLISHING ITSELF THROUGH THIS "REVOLUTIONARY ACT." HE DISCOUNTED THE POSSIBILITY OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT BUT CONCEDED THAT HIS MINISTRY HAD NO REAL CLUES WITH RESPECT TO THE IDENTITY OF THE KIDNAPPERS. LEPAGE'S REFERENCE TO A "NEW GROUP" DOES NOT, OF COURSE, MEAN THESE TERRORISTS ARE NECESSARILY NEW TO THEIR TRADE. THE SMOOTH COURSE OF THE KIDNAPPING ITSELF, ARGUES AGAINST THAT ASSUMPTION. OUR BEST GUESS IS THAT THE "COMANDOS" ARE BREAKAWAY MEMBERS OF ONE OR MORE OF THE EXISTING

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TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS. THE MOST PERSUASIVE SPECULATION LEADS US TO CARLOS BETANCOURT AND PABLO HERNANDEZ PARRA OF THE BR. OF PARTICULAR INTEREST HAS BEEN A WIDELY CIRCULATED MIMEOGRAPHED LEAFLET DATED MARCH 13 EXPELLING THESE TWO GENTLEMEN FROM THE BR FOR "OPEN FRACTIONAL ACTIVITY" IN THE NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION'S NATIONAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE. (THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS WAS A POLICE FORGERY IS, OF COURSE, OPEN.) OTHER EVIDENCE, ALTHOUGH FAR FROMCONCLUSIVE, POINTS TOWARD BETANCOURT.

7. AS PREVIOUSLY INDICATED, THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF THE COMMUNIQUES IS NOT PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY THE KIDNAPPERS. THESE DOCUMENTS INDICATE NO DEFINABLE IDEOLOGY BEYOND A GENERAL COMMITMENT TO MARXISM AND TO THE BATTLE AGAINST "IMPERIALISM" AND THE TNE'S. THE FAILURE TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE CUBAN REVOLUTION OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL "STRUGGLES" CAN BE INTERPRETED AS A TACTICAL PLOY (AN ATTEMPT AT PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION WITH CASTROISM UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS WOULD RISK A DAMAGING REPUDIATION FROM THAT QUARTER) OR MAY SUGGEST A NEW LEFTIST TYPE OF APPROACH BASED ON WHAT THE BR LEAFLET CALLS "SELF-SUFFICIENCY." THE MOST STRIKING ASPECT OF THE COMMUNIQUES FITS IN WITH THIS LATTER HYPOTHESIS. THEY ARE REMARKABLY LITERATE, ON OCCASION CLOSELY REASONED (AS IN THE CASE OF AN "OPEN LETTER OF REPLY" TO JOAQUIN GABALDON MARQUEZ--THE HERO'S OLDER BROTHER--ISSUED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE COMMUNIQUE REPORTED IN CARACAS 3522) AND WRITTEN WITH CONSIDERABLE STYLE. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE INITIAL COMMUNIQUE SHOWED EVIDENCE OF SOME EXPERTISE IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMICS.

8. IN OPERATIONAL TERMS, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE "COMANDOS" ARE OBVIOUSLY NO MERE ACADEMICS. THE KIDNAPPING WAS NEATLY DONE AND THE HIDEAWAY OPERATION OBVIOUSLY CAREFULLY PLANNED. (WE ARE UNAWARE OF ANY PARTICULAR "CONFUSION" AT THE NIEHOUS HOUSE DURING THE OPERATION.) THE ELABORATE MESSAGE-DELIVERING SYSTEM
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AND THE SECURE DETENTION OF NIEHOUS OVER A LENGTHY PERIOD OF TIME DEMONSTRATE AN EFFECTIVE SUPPORT ORGANIZATION. IT IS TRUE THAT THE KIDNAPPERS INCLUDED AT LEAST ONE CRUDE FORGERY IN THE DOCUMENTS ANNEXED TO THE INITIAL COMMUNIQUE. BUT THE CRUDITY WOULD BE APPARENT ONLY IN ITS ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FORM, AND THE GOV IS QUITE OBVIOUSLY BOTHERED BY THAT PARTICULAR DOCUMENT.

9. WHAT ALL THIS ADDS UP TO IN TERMS OF HARD EVIDENCE IS VERY LITTLE INDEED. WE CAN CONJECTURE THAT THE OPERATION WAS DIRECTED BY EXPERIENCED TERRORISTS, THAT A UNIVERSITY ELEMENT IS INVOLVED, THAT THE GROUP IS OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY OF EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS AND THAT THEIR OVERRIDING OBJECTIVE IS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA. THEY MAY HAVE PICKED NIEHOUS BECAUSE OF A CONNECTION WITHIN HIS COMPANY AND BECAUSE THE ISOLATED SITUATION OF HIS HOUSE MADE

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HIM A SAFER TARGET. MEANWHILE, THE VENEZUELAN POLICE CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR BETANCOURT WHILE REMAINING GENERALLY AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS WE ARE.

10. ONE ADDITIONAL THEORY SHOULD BE NOTED IN CONCLUSION. THE COMMUNIST PARTY ASSERTS THAT THE MYSTERIOUS NATURE OF THIS AFFAIR SUGGESTS A CIA PLOT AS THE ONLY REASONABLE EXPLANATION. THE REASONING IS THAT THE MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY OF THE KIDNAPPERS WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN CLEAR BY NOW, AND THAT THE CRIME SERVES THE CIA'S "DESTABILIZATION" OBJECTIVES. UNHAPPILY, THE EXTREME LEFT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE INPROPAGATING THE SUSPICION THAT NIEHOUS HAS CIA OR OTHER U.S. INTELLIGENCE CONNECTIONS. SHLAUDEMAN

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